

# THE ACHAEMENID IMPACT ON LOCAL POPULATIONS AND CULTURES IN ANATOLIA

(Sixth-Fourth Centuries B.C.)

Papers presented at the International Workshop  
Istanbul 20-21 May 2005

(Offprint)



Edited by  
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TURKISH INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

INSTITUTUM TURCICUM SCIENTIAE ANTIQUITATIS  
TÜRK ESKİÇAĞ BİLİMLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ

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ISBN 978-975-807-178-4

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e.mail: [info@zerobooksongline.com](mailto:info@zerobooksongline.com)  
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## An Achaemenid Stamp Seal from Patara

Gül İşin  
Discovery

A stamp seal was found during the 2004 excavation campaign at “Tepecik Cistern” in Patara.<sup>1</sup> This cistern, which had been abandoned for an unknown reason, was used as a pottery dump towards the beginning of the second century B.C. A small section at the upper part of the cistern was first opened during the salvage excavation conducted by the directorate of the Antalya Museum in 1952. A group of pottery, consisting mainly of black-glazed fine ware, was found and taken to the museum. During the 2003 campaign, the Patara team decided to explore the traces of this fine black-glazed pottery and started to excavate up on the Tepecik Hill. The cistern was thus unearthed (fig. 1). Although the excavation at the cistern was completed in 2004, the area still awaits subsequent campaigns in order to give a whole picture of the building complex, which was located at one of the most important and beautiful parts of the city, overlooking the harbor (fig. 2).

In addition to this stamp seal, many other important and valuable finds were unearthed during the 2004 campaign. The seal was found at the same level with an imported Tanagra figurine dated to the early third century B.C.<sup>2</sup> As the discovery position of the figurine and the seal confirms, no stratigraphic evidence was obtainable from the cistern. Nevertheless, except for the two stray Lycian League coins from the late second century B.C., we did not find –even any small sherd of– pottery dating from after the beginning of the second century. In other words; the late third / early second century B.C. is the terminus post quem for the Tepecik cistern. Amongst the earliest objects, two figurines may well be stylistically dated to the Geometric or doubtfully to the Protogeometric period, and a small quantity of pottery fragments from the cistern can be assigned to the late seventh and early sixth

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the organization committee of the workshop on “*The Achaemenid Impact on Local Populations and Cultures in Anatolia*” who invited me to this meeting. I am also grateful to Fahri İşik for his permission to publish this seal. My special thanks go to Şevket Aktaş for the photographs and to the whole 2004 Patara excavation team. For the results of the 2004 excavation campaign of Patara, see İşik 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The fabric and style of the figurine are very similar to the products of the well-known Tanagra workshop. The fully modeled, standing boy figurine wears a cloak and a thick wreath. His cloak is draped tightly over his shoulders and he lifts up his left hand as if to expose himself. The “closed” composition and the “balanced” and “carefully” designed drapery of the figurine give a date in the early third century.

centuries B.C. All the rest of the material can, for the most part, be roughly dated to the period from the Archaic to the early Hellenistic, but the majority belongs to between ca. 300-220 B.C. Consequently, from the start, one can suggest that the Patara seal is not of direct relevance to the majority of the material in its context, unless it was an object that was kept as an inheritance by the elite of Patara, who lived at the Tepecik Hill and used the potteries of fine ware from the late fourth and early third centuries.

## Description

The conoid stamp seal with a round back and oval face is carved out of strong blue lapis lazuli. It is 1.52 cm. in height with a base measuring 1.1 cm. by 0.9 cm. It has a suspension hole drilled halfway towards its top (fig. 3). The stone has some grains and small cracks both on the top and underneath. On the slightly convex underside of the stamp, carved in intaglio, is a winged sphinx with the head of a long-bearded royal person or hero wearing a *kidaris* (Roaf 1983: 148; Kaptan 1988: 98-99) facing to the left. The hair is tied up at the nape and the beard is long and stepped. The wing is divided into two with two counter and flight feathers; it is not curved towards the top as is usual. Due to poor preservation, comprehending the pose of the figure is quite difficult. The posture of the thigh suggests a half-sitting position but the short foreleg reminds one of perhaps a bird's or cock's anatomy with the talons splayed to the left. The rear of the figure resembles a lion with the tail pointing sharply upwards. The inherently grained and damaged surface of the intaglio renders difficulty in the identification of the lines defining the relationship between the foreleg and the rear; these lines appear only as scratches on the surface. Another complexity is caused by the lambda-like sign, very close to the back of the sphinx. These linear traces can be understood either as a tail or a letter-like mark, as in Achaemenid coins and seals (Boardman 1970b: 22-24; 1998: 1 fig. 1 D54). The use of certain devices and symbols on coins of several dynasts may have been used to indicate the issuing office (Vismara 1996: 238), such devices on seals, on the other hand, are only personal symbols (Child 1981: 55-80). Nevertheless I prefer to define this lambda-like image as the tail of our hard-to-decipher sphinx (figs. 4-5).

## Discussion

**Material:** The Patara seal is made of lapis lazuli, which was highly prized because the sole quarries were in Afghanistan. It is dark blue with metallic patches (pyrites) and is not very hard at 5.5. As it is somewhat porous, it should be stored carefully to avoid scratches. Probably for this reason, lapis lazuli was rarely used for seal engraving compared to other gems (Boardman 1970a: 377; Zazoff 1983: 157). Steatite, chalcedony, cornelian (sard), and jasper were much preferred for the carving of intaglios in ancient times (Boardman 1970b: 20). Especially cornelian obtained at Sardis and chalcedony from Kadıköy were probably more usually employed by the Anatolian engravers compared to the others (Boardman 1970a: 326; 1976; 1998: 1-13). The Patara seal, however, is very uncommon due to its material, its somewhat smaller size, and even its impression as well.

**Shape:** The oval conoid shape of the Patara seal derives from a Babylonian type. As Legrain emphasized (1925: 43), in the course of time towards the start of the first millennium B.C., the art of seal engraving went into decline and cylinder seals passed out of fashion. Conoid seals were commonly produced from the eighth to the fourth century B.C. in the neo-Assyrian, neo-Babylonian, and Achaemenid periods (Keel-Leu 1991).<sup>3</sup> Compared to the Persian, Babylonian conoids are slimmer in proportion and the Patara example is also somewhat slimmer in size. Seals of this shape were worn as pendants (Boardman 1970a: 305). According to documented examples, which can be spotted mostly in museum catalogues, this shape was not as popular as the pyramidal or scaraboid stamp seals in Anatolia. With the exception of an outstandingly large conoid example from Troy, there is no matching find of Anatolian origin among conoid seals published in museum catalogues. The new discovery from Troy bearing the image of Ahuramazda, the patron deity of the Achaemenid Persian court, is an interesting one. According to Miller-Collet and Root, the particular shape of the Trojan seal may reflect a western workshop tradition and seems to have been a local product of some workshops within the Phoenician sphere (1997: 357). The Patara seal, on the other hand, is very similar in shape to a general class of conoids produced within the neo-Assyrian or Babylonian spheres down into the early Achaemenid period (Buchanan – Moorey 1988: nos. 358, 361, 368, 377, 378, 379).

**Depiction:** The head of a royal person or hero with a *kidaris* or a pointed crown, combined with the body of a winged bull (Mørkholm – Zahle 1972: 97), lion (Boardman 1970b: nos. 116-125), goat (Boardman 1970b: 34), scorpion (d'Amore 1992: 244-245 fig. 4b; Delaporte 1920: no. 15 D.102 pl. 52 fig. 15), bird, or even fish (Eisen 1940: 54 no. 95; AGD I, 1: no. 29) was a common preference that can easily be found on Achaemenid seals. A long beard is usually common for royal heads rather than for heroes. On the basis of the classification by Boardman (1970b: 30-36; also, Zazoff 1983: 169-179), the chosen subject of the impression makes the Patara seal closer to the court-style. However, stylistic criteria, such as the poor treatment of anatomic details, careless modeling, and the summary treatment of joints, drives the Patara seal closer to the mixed-style (Boardman 1970a: 312-313), also named the “Graeco-Persian Free Style” by Zazoff (1983: 175-176) or perhaps more preferably termed the “Anatolian-Persian Style” by Kaptan (1988: 188).<sup>4</sup> The modeling on the body of the lion and the posture of the legs on the Patara seal are remarkably different from the other known examples; I could not find an exact parallel for the Patara impression either amongst seals or coins. This difference may be explained by assuming the symbols on the seals to be personal emblems.

Generally on the basis of the chosen subject –court style<sup>5</sup>– and of the typology, the Patara seal may be dated to the second half of the fifth century, to the reigns of Kuprlli and Kheriga in Xanthos. However, the very poor treatment, the careless anatomical details, and the absence of any comparative material make it rather difficult to assign the Patara seal to an exact date. When some examples of Lycian art from the first half of the fourth century are taken

<sup>3</sup> For examples, see Keel-Leu 1991: nos. 95, 117-124, 131, 143-145, 148-150, 152, 157-158, 167; Eisen 1940: no. 94; Delaporte 1920: nos. 711, A 966, A 1153, A 1155.

<sup>4</sup> For a new discussion, see also, Boardman 2000: 156-158.

<sup>5</sup> Zazoff (1983:176) dates the court style to 522-465 B.C.

into consideration, it is observed that Achaemenid elements are still to be observed easily as they were in the fifth century B.C.<sup>6</sup> Because of this fact, proposing a later date in the first half of fourth century for this unique find also seems probable.

### An attempted explanation of the “Patara Seal” within its historical context

According to Herodotus (3.90.1) Lycia was included in the first satrapy together with Ionia, Caria, Milyas, and Pamphylia. Geographically Lycians were at an important strategic juncture between the East and West. It is very well known that the Lycian shores had notable importance for both the Athenians and the Persians. Any fleet attempting to travel from the Aegean to the east Mediterranean or vice versa would certainly have to travel along the coast of Lycia (Keen 1998: 31-33). The region attracted the great powers of the era, not only because of its strategic importance, but also due to its natural resources. As Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 13.11 [52]; 16.59[137]) mentions, timber, especially cedar for shipbuilding, was abundant in Lycia (Child 1981: 61). In addition, Lycia was on the grain route from Egypt, and the existence of Roman granaries at Patara and Andriake indicates that Lycia was a main granary depot of the east Mediterranean (Zimmermann 1992: 231). Despite this, it is certainly notable that there is no evidence for Persian garrisons in Lycia before the late fourth century (Keen 1998: 84). Lycians participated in the expedition of Xerxes in 481-479 (Diodorus 11.2.2) and provided 50 ships according to Herodotus (7.92). It was suggested that the entire fleet was based at Patara or Pttara, as it is known from the Xanthian inscribed pillar (Bryce 1986: 204). Although the epigraphic or literary sources do not provide any clue about the status of Patara during this period, it is assumed that it functioned as the port of Xanthos (Keen 1998: 60). After the mid-fifth century, Lycia appears in the Athenian tribute lists for the years 452/0 and 446/5 (Child 1981: 55-56). Twenty years later, those Lycian cities that refused to pay their dues to the naval union were punished by Melasandros. In the winter of 430/29 B.C. the Athenian commander came ashore at the Phoinikus Bay, possibly at Firnaz, to the east of Patara and the Xanthians most probably together with the people of Patara under the command of Kheriga defeated the Athenians and Melasandros died (Thucydides 8.28). This ambivalent position of the Lycians between the East and the West may have been the only unchanging sign of their identity through the centuries.

In the fifth century B.C. Lycia was the richest Achaemenian coin-minting non-Greek area in Anatolia (Mørkholm – Zahle 1972: 59). Although there were many local dynasts known to have struck coins from about 480 to 360 B.C. (Mørkholm – Zahle 1972: 112), nothing is known about their personal seals. Apart from a single published scaraboid seal from Xanthos, dated to the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Metzger 1972: no. 418 A16-1296 fig. 13), the current seal from Patara seems to be the only example for the entire region. This is surprisingly few for an area where excavations have been going on for at least forty years.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, some depictions at the Heroon of Pericle with Persian elements (Borchhardt 1990: 75-78), a male figure with the *tiara* from the rock-cut tomb at Asartaş (İşin 1994: 72), and the coins again with the *tiara*-bearing portraits of the dynasts from the early fourth century can be interpreted as the evidences of ongoing Achaemenid influence in Lycia. There is also an interesting example from Labraunda, Caria from the mid-fourth century, when Lycia was under Carian domination. Found at the 1953 excavations in Labraunda, Andron B (Stucky 1998: 123-125), this seal shows a sphinx with a royal head somewhat similar to the head of the sphinx on the Patara seal.

The find spots of this type of seals are overwhelmingly located in western Asia Minor especially at Sardis, the satrapy capital (Boardman 1970a: 306). As most of the finds bear Lydian devices, they are understood to have originated mostly in Lydia. This seems reasonable, but the discovery of an Achaemenid seal at Patara seems unusual. Apart from the abovementioned geographical importance and relations with the authoritative city of Xanthos, there is very little information in the ancient sources about Patara during the fifth century. The only important information comes from Herodotus (1.182) and is related to the oracle center of Apollo. Although the city may have prospered economically due to its harbor, politically it seems to have been in the shadow of Xanthos in this period.

Finally, to suggest an owner for the seal from Patara, the special case of both the region and the city needs to be taken into consideration. According to linguistic research we do not have sufficient evidence for a Persian population in Lycia during the Achaemenid period (Bryce 1986: 160-161; Keen 1998: 61-64). In the light of this knowledge, it is not possible to suggest a Persian official as the owner of this seal. Instead, the seal may well have been employed by a local official of high rank or by a privileged merchant appointed by the Xanthian dynasty, controlling imported and/or exported goods at the harbor of Patara.

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Fig. 1 The cistern on Tepecik Hill



Fig. 2 Tepecik Hill



Fig. 3 The stamp seal from Patara



Fig. 4 The stamp seal from Patara, detail



Fig. 5 The stamp seal from Patara, impression.

